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**TITLE: THE ISSUE OF FAKE NEWS, DODGY HEALTH ADVICE AND FAKE CURES SURROUNDING COVID-19**

**What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)? :**

Coronavirus also known as COVID-19 is highly transmittable and deadly respiratory disease that has a high spread rate with no known cure. Currently there is an ongoing worldwide pandemic of the disease, COVID-19. It is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The outbreak was first noted in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and recognized it as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of 7 April 2020, more than 1.35 million cases have been reported in over 200 countries and territories, resulting in approximately 74,800 deaths. More than 285,000 people have recovered.

The virus is mainly spread during close contact and by small droplets produced when those infected cough, sneeze or talk. The small droplets may be produced during breathing; however, they rapidly fall to the ground or surfaces and are not generally spread through the air over large distances. People may also become infected by touching a contaminated surface and then their face. The virus can live on surfaces up to 72 hours. Common symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Complications may include pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome. There is no known vaccine or specific antiviral treatment.

During this time fake news and speculations surfaced the internet and social media. There is a lot of misleading information on the web and also in form of messages and broadcast messages being sent to a vast majority of people on social media. Theories and Conspiracies have also risen since the outbreak about the Coronavirus being a weapon created to wipe out a great percentage of the population of the people on earth. Fake cures and wrong health advice has also been distributed through this medium and is trending everywhere.

**Increase in fake online shops since coronavirus outbreak**

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the fake online shops have been shooting up like mushrooms. Through these fake online shops, mouth masks, caps, masks and disinfectants such as sanitizer hand gels are offered at prices many times the market level. Scammers respond to consumers' fears of running out of stock and the willingness to pay a high price for the products.

**Fake news, don’t believe everything you read!**

Toothpaste that protects you against the virus or promoting ‘preventive’ consumption of alcohol. Two examples of misleading information that are going ‘viral’ on social media. All kinds of conspiracy theories, photographs and videos are circulating that claim to show the consequences of the corona pandemic. For example, some claim that the virus was developed in a laboratory, the RIVM was lying about the seriousness of the virus and the pandemic is designed for the disintegration of the European Union. Don't believe everything you read!

**The theory of no COVID-19**

 There is a recent speculation of the theory that the Coronavirus is a hoax and is a cover-up by the government to launch the 5G network. It is said that it is the radiation to the body from the phone signals that is causing the deaths. The theory instigates that the government want to use the 5G to gain access to your information and location through an R.F.I.D chip in the vaccine that is supposed to be for immunization and through this the right to privacy, bank and personal info will be lost. This information has no proof and therefore cannot be identified as a true statement.

**The Bitter kola remedy**

On WhatsApp, there is a broadcast message going round about bitter kola being the remedy to the coronavirus pandemic. It is said to have started from Professor Maurice Iwu, a medical doctor. According to Prof Iwu, Bitter kola contains quinine which is an antimalarial drug which works against viruses including the coronavirus.

This remedy is not enlisted or recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) or Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and therefore cannot be trustworthy.

 **Garlic**

Lots of posts that recommend eating garlic to prevent infection are being shared on Facebook.

The WHO (World Health Organization) says that while it is "a healthy food that may have some antimicrobial properties", there's no evidence that eating garlic can protect people from the new coronavirus.

In lots of cases, these kinds of remedies aren't harmful in themselves, as long as they aren't preventing you from following evidence-based medical advice. But they have the potential to be.

The South China Morning Post reported a story of a woman who had to receive hospital treatment for a severely inflamed throat after consuming 1.5kg of raw garlic.

We know, in general, that eating fruit and vegetables and drinking water can be good for staying healthy. However, there is no evidence specific foods will help fight this particular virus.

 **'Miracle minerals'**

YouTuber Jordan Sather, who has many thousands of followers across different platforms, has been claiming that a "miracle mineral supplement", called MMS, can "wipe out" coronavirus.

It contains chlorine dioxide - a bleaching agent.

Sather and others promoted the substance even before the coronavirus outbreak, and in January he tweeted that, "not only is chlorine dioxide (aka MMS) an effective cancer cell killer, it can wipe out coronavirus too**".**

****Last year, the[US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned about the dangers to health of drinking MMS.](https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/danger-dont-drink-miracle-mineral-solution-or-similar-products) Health authorities in other countries have also issued alerts about it.

The FDA says it "is not aware of any research showing that these products are safe or effective for treating any illness". It warns that drinking them can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and symptoms of severe dehydration.

 **Home-made hand sanitizer**

There have been many reports of shortages of hand sanitiser gel, as [washing your hands is one key way to prevent spread of the virus](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51711227).

As reports of the shortages emerged in Italy, so did recipes for home-made gel on social media.

But these recipes, alleged dupes for one of the country's most popular brands, were for a disinfectant better suited for cleaning surfaces and, as scientists pointed out, not suitable for use on skin.

Alcohol-based hand gels usually also contain emollients, which make them gentler on skin, on top of their 60-70% alcohol content.

Professor Sally Bloomfield, at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, says she does not believe you could make an effective product for sanitizing hands at home - [even vodka only contains 40% alcohol](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51763775).

For cleaning surfaces, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says most common household disinfectants should be effective.

 **Drinkable silver**

The use of colloidal silver was promoted on US televangelist Jim Bakker's show. Colloidal silver is tiny particles of the metal suspended in liquid. A guest on the show claimed the solution kills some strains of coronavirus within 12 hours (while admitting it hadn't yet been tested on Covid-19).

The idea that it could be an effective treatment for coronavirus has been widely shared on Facebook, particularly by "medical freedom" groups which are deeply suspicious of mainstream medical advice.

Proponents of colloidal silver claim it can treat all kinds of health conditions, act as an antiseptic, and state it helps the immune system. There are some occasional uses of silver in healthcare, for example in bandages applied to wounds, but that doesn't mean it's effective to consume.

There's clear advice from the US health authorities that there's no evidence this type of silver solution is effective for any health condition. More importantly, [it could cause serious side effects](https://nccih.nih.gov/health/colloidalsilver) including kidney damage, seizures and argyria - a condition that makes your skin turn blue.

They say that, unlike iron or zinc, silver is not a metal that has any function in the human body.

Some of those promoting the substance for general health on social media have found their posts now generate a pop-up warning from Facebook's fact-checking service.

 **Drinking water every 15 minutes**

One post, copied and pasted by multiple Facebook accounts, quotes a "Japanese doctor" who recommends drinking water every 15 minutes to flush out any virus that might have entered the mouth. A version in Arabic has been shared more than 250,000 times.

Professor Trudie Lang at the University of Oxford says there is "no biological mechanism" that would support the idea that you can just wash a respiratory virus down into your stomach and kill it.

Infections like coronaviruses enter the body via the respiratory tract when you breathe in. Some of them might go into your mouth, but even constantly drinking water isn't going to prevent you from catching the virus.

Nonetheless, drinking water and staying hydrated is generally good medical advice.

 **Heat and avoiding ice cream**

There are lots of variations of the advice suggesting heat kills the virus, from recommending drinking hot water to taking hot baths, or using hairdryers.

One post, copied and pasted by dozens of social media users in different countries - and falsely attributed to Unicef - claims that drinking hot water and exposure to the sun will kill the virus, and says ice cream is to be avoided.

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Charlotte Gornitzka, who works for Unicef on coronavirus misinformation, says: "A recent erroneous online message...purporting to be a Unicef communication appears to indicate that avoiding ice cream and other cold foods can help prevent the onset of the disease. This is, of course, wholly untrue."

We know the flu virus doesn't survive well outside the body during the summer, but we don't yet know how heat impacts the new coronavirus.

Trying to heat your body or expose yourself to the sun - presumably to make it inhospitable to the virus - is completely ineffective, according to Prof Bloomfield. Once the virus is in your body, there's no way of killing it - your body just has to fight it off.

Outside the body, "to actively kill the virus you need temperatures of around 60 degrees [Celsius]", says Professor Bloomfield - far hotter than any bath.

Washing bed linen or towels at 60C is a good idea, as this can kill any viruses in the fabric. But it's not a good option for washing your skin.

And having a hot bath or drinking hot liquids won't change your actual body temperature, which remains stable unless you are already ill.

**Coronavirus being the punishment for homosexuality**

Israel’s homophobic health minister Yaakov Litzman claimed that the coronavirus was the divine punishment for homosexuality. He has now tested positive for coronavirus and is receiving backlash and being trolled on social media platforms for his statements and the result. He had tested negative twice before but now he is positive and is in quarantine. He was accused of praying at the home of a fellow member of his Gur Hasidic sect last Saturday- three days after Israel brought in health guidelines barring services from being held indoors.

**Be on the lookout**

The easiest way to avoid falling victim to fraud during the Coronavirus outbreak is by using common sense and making sure that you adopt healthy browsing practices. Most importantly, keep an eye out for:

* Suspicious links from unfamiliar sources
* Emails claiming to come from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization (WHO) promoting cures or pseudo-drugs that treat or prevent the virus
* Ignore and report any false advertisement you see on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter

Remember, your safety always comes first. Don’t let your guard down and be proactive when it comes to your online activity and search patterns. Make sure you also promote good online practices to your friends and family, and do your virus-related research diligently on trustworthy websites.

**Online platforms ban fake news**

Online platforms such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Amazon are taking action to stop fake news. The search results have been adjusted and fake news will be removed as soon as possible. This will give government information and information from the WHO a prominent place on these platforms. As a result, the large amount of fake news is pushed into the background and facts are more clearly distinguished from opinions. Also, various social media platforms remove all messages that contain misleading, inflammatory or threatening information about the coronavirus.

**Measures: getting to grips with the truth**

The Commission welcomes the online platforms' initiative to fight fake news and calls on everyone to do their bit. To ensure that each EU country takes the same measures, the European Commission has drawn up a directive in cooperation with national consumer authorities. This guideline will be published this week. The Commission invites national authorities to take swift enforcement measures after publication of the Directive, to prevent that consumers are no longer taken advantage of at this vulnerable time.